

## Safe Home

Last Updated Tuesday, 25 April 2006

### LIVING IN WILDFIRE HAZARD AREAS

#### FOR ALL EMERGENCIES DIAL 9-1-1

When you build or buy a home in one of the forested/wildland areas of Boulder County, you have accepted the fact that these areas have poor access, native vegetation, steep slopes, and no fire fighting water supplies. In order to attempt to prevent a tragedy, you need to be aware of wildfire hazards and what to do when a wildfire occurs in your area.

Hopefully, you have already created defensible space around your home and made other improvements to increase the chances that it can survive a wildfire. Defensible space is an area of 30 feet or more around your home that is kept free of features that tend to increase the risk of your home being destroyed. Other improvements include improving driveway access and water supplies, having a fire-resistive roof, enclosing overhanging eaves and decks, spark arresters on chimneys, etc.

10 Steps to Defensible Space (see illustration)

1. Thin tree and brush cover.
2. Dispose of slash and debris left from thinning.
3. Remove dead limbs, leaves and other litter.
4. Stack firewood away from home.
5. Maintain irrigated green belt around the home.
6. Mow dry grasses and weeds.
7. Prune branches to 10 feet above the ground.
8. Trim branches.
9. Clean roof and gutters.
10. Reduce density of surrounding forest.

## DEVELOPING A FIRE PLAN

### USE THIS CHECKLIST TO HELP DEVELOP YOUR OWN FIRE PLAN.

Ask your local fire department for advice. Talk with your neighbors about tools, equipment and other resources you could share in an emergency.

### ELEMENTS OF PLAN

\* Evacuation Plan. Early evacuation is the safest way to avoid injury or death. Timing and other factors can vary so widely that each household needs its own specific plan, including options to cover anything that might happen.

\* Escape Routes. Normal and alternate escape routes.

\* Safety Zones. Locations of and routes to large areas with little or no vegetation or other fuels where family members can ride out the fire if it's too late to evacuate.

\* Communication. Pre-arrange normal and alternate ways to stay in touch with family members, even if phones are out. Family members might "check in" with a friend or relative in another area as soon as they're able.

\* Assignments. Who is to do what when in an emergency

### PROVIDE EQUIPMENT

\* Hoses. Pre-connected to faucets.

\* Ladder. Long enough to reach the roof easily.

\* Fire Extinguishers. One or more 5-pound multipurpose type, readily available.

\* Protective Clothing. For anyone who is unable to evacuate before the fire arrives. This includes a cotton long-sleeved shirt or jacket and trousers, a handkerchief to provide minimum protection for the lungs (avoid inhaling smoke or hot gases!), o leather boots, D gloves, a helmet or other head covering and D goggles. Cotton clothing is a "must." Synthetic fabrics can melt onto your skin.

### WHEN CAUGHT IN WILDFIRE

If you see a wildfire, call 9-1-1. Don't assume that someone else has already called. Describe the location of the fire, speak slowly and clearly, and answer any questions asked by the dispatcher.

## BEFORE THE FIRE APPROACHES YOUR HOUSE

- \* Evacuate. Evacuate your pets and all family members who are not essential to preparing the home. Anyone with medical or physical limitations and the young and the elderly should be evacuated immediately.
- \* Wear Protective Clothing.
- \* Remove Combustibles. Clear items that will burn from around the house, including wood piles, lawn furniture, barbecue grills, tarp coverings, etc. Move them outside of your defensible space.
- \* Close/Protect Openings. Close outside attic, eaves and basement vents, windows, doors, pet doors, etc. Remove flammable drapes and curtains. Close all shutters, blinds or heavy non-combustible window coverings to reduce radiant heat.
- \* Close Inside Doors/Open Damper. Close all doors inside the house to prevent draft. Open the damper on your fireplace, but close the fireplace screen.
- \* Shut Off Gas. Shut off any natural gas, propane or fuel oil supplies at the source.
- \* Water. Connect garden hoses. Fill any pools, hot tubs, garbage cans, tubs or other large containers with water.
- \* Pumps. If you have gas-powered pumps for water, make sure they are fueled and ready.
- \* Ladder. Place a ladder against the house in clear view.
- \* Car. Back your car into the driveway and roll up the windows.
- \* Garage Doors. Disconnect any automatic garage door openers so that doors can still be opened by hand if the power goes out. Close all garage doors.
- \* Valuables. Place valuable papers, mementos and anything "you can't live without" inside the car in the garage, ready for quick departure. Any pets still with you should also be put in the car.

## PREPARING TO LEAVE

- \* Lights. Turn on outside lights and leave a light on in every room to make the house more visible in heavy smoke.
- \* Don't Lock Up. Leave doors and windows closed but unlocked. It may be necessary for firefighters to gain quick entry into your home to fight fire. The entire area will be isolated and patrolled by sheriff's deputies or police.

## SURVIVAL IN A VEHICLE

- \* This is dangerous and should only be done in an emergency, but you can survive the firestorm if you stay in your car. It is much less dangerous than trying to run from a fire on foot.
- \* Roll up windows and close air vents. Drive slowly with headlights on. Watch for other vehicles and pedestrians. Do not

drive through heavy smoke.

\* If you have to stop, park away from the heaviest trees and brush. Turn headlights on and ignition off. Roll up windows and close air vents.

\* Get on the floor and cover up with a blanket or coat.

Stay in the vehicle until the main fire passes.

\* Stay in the car. Do not run! Engine may stall and not restart. Air currents may rock the car. Some smoke and sparks may enter the vehicle. Temperature inside will increase. Metal gas tanks and containers rarely explode.

#### IF YOU ARE TRAPPED AT HOME

\* Stay calm. As the fire front approaches, go inside the house. You can survive inside. The fire will pass before your house burns down.

#### AFTER THE FIRE PASSES

\* Check the roof immediately. Put out any roof fires, sparks or embers. Check the attic for hidden burning sparks.

\* If you have a fire, get your neighbors to help fight it.

\* The water you put into your pool or hot tub and other containers will come in handy now. If the power is out, try connecting a hose to the outlet on your water heater.

\* For several hours after the fire, maintain a "fire watch." Re-check for smoke and sparks throughout the house.

#### IF CAUGHT IN THE OPEN

\* The best temporary shelter is in a sparse fuel area. On a steep mountainside, the back side is safer. Avoid canyons, natural "chimneys" and saddles.

\* If a road is nearby, lie face down along the road cut or in the ditch on the uphill side. Cover yourself with anything that will shield you from the fire's heat.

\* If hiking in the back country, seek a depression with sparse fuel. Clear fuel away from the area while the fire is approaching and then lie face down in the depression and cover yourself. Stay down until after the fire passes!

#### BOULDER COUNTY FIRE FIGHTERS ASSOCIATION

Rural areas, especially in the mountains, are not served by city fire departments with full-time paid fire fighters nor do they have staffed fire stations less than five minutes away.

Boulder County's fire protection is provided by over 25 separate fire protection agencies. Most of these are small fire protection districts staffed by volunteer fire fighters. Fire fighters are present at the fire stations only if they are responding to an emergency, maintaining or repairing equipment, training or attending some other fire department meeting.

BCFFA is the volunteer organization that supports the county's fire protection districts. Some of the services provided by

BCFFA include communication, coordination, education and training, mutual aid agreements, disaster response planning and coordination, and wildfire hazard mitigation programs. A number of other agencies, like the Boulder County Sheriff's Department, Colorado State Forest Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and other agencies also coordinate with BCFFA and participate in its programs and activities.

## IMPORTANT INFORMATION

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For additional information on how to improve your chances of surviving a wildfire, contact YOUR LOCAL FIRE DEPARTMENT or one of the other agencies listed below. Ask about other written materials and the availability of video tapes on the subject.

If you don't know the name of the Fire Protection District that serves your property or who to contact there, call the:

Boulder County Sheriff's Department Emergency Services Group 303-441-3647  
OTHER INFORMATION SOURCES

Colorado State Forest Service 936 Lefthand Canyon Drive Boulder, Colorado 80302 303-442-0428

Boulder County Land Use Department Building Safety & Inspection Services Division P.O. Box 471 Boulder, Colorado 80306 2040 14th Street Boulder, Colorado 80302 303-441-3925

City of Boulder Fire Department Wildland Fire Coordinator 1805 33rd Street Boulder, Colorado 80301 303-441-3350